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WASHINGTON POST  
31 August 1983

# U.S. Knew Barbie Past Before Hiring, Ex-Agent Claims

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LOS ANGELES, Aug. 30—U.S. Army intelligence in Europe knew of Gestapo leader Klaus Barbie's activities in deporting and massacring French Jews at least two years before he was hired as a U.S. intelligence agent in 1947, a former member of the Army's Counter Intelligence Corps said today.

Michel Thomas, a French resistance fighter who was once captured and interrogated by Barbie, said that he helped compile a file on Barbie and other Gestapo leaders while working at the CIC office in Munich in 1945. Now a New York-based businessman, Thomas said he was "outraged" by a Justice Department report two weeks ago suggesting that U.S. officials hired Barbie without realizing he was guilty of serious war crimes.

In releasing the government's 218-page report on the Barbie affair, Justice Department official Allan A. Ryan said that the United States had apologized formally to France for protecting the former Nazi and smuggling him to Bolivia in 1951 after French efforts to prosecute him for war crimes became known.

Barbie now awaits trial in France for "crimes against humanity" committed while he was head of the Gestapo in the Lyons area during the German occupation of France in World War II.

Thomas is scheduled to hold a press conference at the Simon Wiesenthal Center here Wednesday to recount his story and ask for a more complete report on the original hiring of Barbie and on the officers responsible. Rabbi Marvin Hier, dean of the center devoted to the study of Nazi crimes against Jews and others during the war, said that his request for a full congressional investigation already has the support of Reps. Mel Levine (D-Calif.) and Howard L. Berman (D-Calif.).

In an interview, Thomas said that he objected to the Justice Department report making Army intelligence officers seem like "naive innocents" in overlooking Barbie's record when he was hired to probe postwar intelligence contacts between France and the Soviet Union. Of the decision to hire Barbie, Thomas said, "The best I can say of it is that it was complete and total incompetence." He said he was amazed that U.S. officers had overlooked the files in their Munich office, which recounted instances of murder and torture under Barbie's command. As a lieutenant in the French army attached to the CIC office in Munich, Thomas said that he helped compile the file based largely on the testimony of other Gestapo officers who "were very cooperative" in testifying about acts of their colleagues.

Thomas said that he worked for the CIC from 1944 to 1947, when he immigrated to the United States and began a string of language instruction centers in Los Angeles. Thomas, who said he is in his 60s, is Jewish, and lost both of his parents in the Nazi death camp at Auschwitz, Poland.

He said that he feels the Army intelligence officers he worked with would not have let Barbie be hired as an agent. But most of those officers had left Europe by 1947, he said, and were replaced by career officers "who had very poor training as intelligence officers."

"Many of them did not even speak German," Thomas said.